

WEST NILE VIRUS

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

WHAT IS WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV)?

West Nile virus is a **mosquito-carried virus** that usually causes mild or no illness in humans. In rare cases, WNV can cause encephalitis (swelling of the brain) or meningitis (swelling of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

IS WNV IN MASSACHUSETTS?

Yes. WNV has been found in Massachusetts in birds, mosquitoes, horses and humans.

HOW IS WNV SPREAD?

WNV is most commonly spread to people by the **bite of an infected mosquito**. A mosquito can become infected by biting a bird that carries the virus. It may also be spread through blood transfusions or organ transplants. There are reports that WNV may be passed from pregnant or breastfeeding women to their babies. The risk to the unborn baby is still unknown.

SHOULD I REPORT DEAD BIRDS?

Yes. It is important to report the location of dead birds to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health by calling 1-866-MASS WNV (627-7968). While most dead birds will not be collected and tested for WNV, keeping track of their locations plays an important role in guiding further bird, mosquito and human surveillance activities.

WILL THERE BE PESTICIDE SPRAYING IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD?

Depending on whether or not WNV is found in birds and mosquitoes in your area, pesticide spraying may be done. Your local board of health or mosquito control project is the best source for information about pesticide spraying.

I'VE BEEN BITTEN BY A MOSQUITO. SHOULD I BE TESTED FOR WNV?

No. Illnesses caused by mosquito bites are very rare. Very few mosquito bites carry any risk. People who are bitten by mosquitoes carrying the WNV will usually experience **no illness or very mild illness**. However, you should see a health care provider immediately if you develop symptoms such as:

- high fever
- severe headache
- confusion
- stiff neck
- muscle weakness
- sensitivity to light

Patients with mild symptoms usually recover completely and do not require any specific medication or laboratory testing. Less than 1% of people infected

with WNV develop serious illness. Persons older than 50 years of age have a higher risk of developing severe illness such as encephalitis.

IS THERE TREATMENT OR A VACCINE FOR WNV?

There is **no human vaccine or specific treatment** for WNV infection, but health care providers can treat the symptoms of WNV. In severe cases, hospitalization may be needed to provide supportive care.

Questions?

Call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Information Line at 1-866-MASS WNV (627-7968) or visit our web site:

www.mass.gov/dph

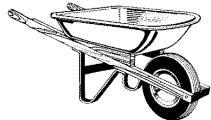
Protect Yourself

Your risk of getting ill from WNV is low, but you can lower your risk even more. Since there is no human vaccine for WNV, **the best way to protect yourself is to keep mosquitoes from biting you**. Follow these simple steps and protect yourself:

- Limit **outdoor activities** between dusk and dawn.
- If you must be outdoors, **wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants and socks**.
- Consider using a **mosquito repellent** that contains DEET (the chemical N-N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) and follow the directions on the label. Never use DEET on infants. Avoid using repellents with DEET concentrations above 10-15% for children and above 30-35% for adults. Cream, lotion or stick formulas are best for use on skin.
- Make sure **window and door screens** do not have holes in them.

Remove Standing Water

Mosquitoes grow in standing (stagnant) water. Getting rid of that water helps to lower the number of mosquitoes in your area. Look around outside your house for containers and other things that might collect water and turn them over, regularly empty them, or dispose of them.



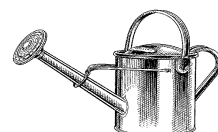
wheelbarrows



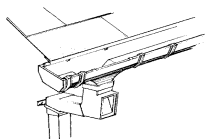
unused flower pots



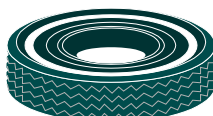
trash cans and lids



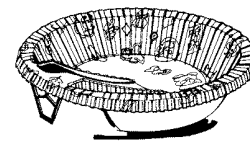
watering cans



storm gutters



tires



wading pools